

**Summary of the “Independent Aging Agenda Events”
For the
2005 White House Conference on Aging
May 9, 2005
10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Morris University Center
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Edwardsville, Illinois**

Record of Attendance

Liaison: 1

WHCOA panel members present: 7

Moderator: 1

Attendees: 47

Host and Co-Sponsors

The “Independent Aging Agenda Event” was hosted by the Area Agency on Aging of Southwestern Illinois and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. The session took place at the Morris University Center, SIUE, during the SIU-E Senior Fair. Joy Paeth was the Area Agency on Aging of Southwestern Illinois Liaison for the “Independent Aging Agenda Event”.

Format and Recording

The “Independent Aging Agenda Event” heard from two panels consisting of 7 presenters:

Each presenter was allotted 5 minutes of oral testimony. The testimony was in Coordinated social and health services providing the maximum opportunity to age in place, and Housing availability and affordability

The event was recorded by the Area Agency on Aging’s, Executive Administrative Assistant.

Call to Order

The “Independent Aging Agenda Event” was called to order at 10:30 a.m. Joy Paeth.

Introductory Remarks from the WHCOA member

Joy Paeth introduced the Moderator David Paulsmeyer, Ph.D., MPA, Adjunct Professor of Gerontology. Dr. Paulsmeyer thanked the Area Agency on Aging and introduced presenters that were prepared to address important Aging and boomer issues requiring national attention over the next ten years.

Summary of Testimony

Panel #1 Coordinated Social and Health services providing the maximum opportunity to age in place

1. **Susan Thomas**, Manager, Para Transit Services Madison Co. Transit is fortunate to be able to serve the older population with both fixed routes and demand and response service. The need for door to door service continues to increase as the population of older adults grows. Challenges accessing the fixed routes continue to mount as the populations physical limitations increase.
 - Accessible sidewalks along the bus routes are needed to make public transportation an option for older persons. Sidewalks must have curb cuts, curb ramps and must be free of barriers such as gaps and cracks. Community design must address the availability of older adults to walk safely to be able access services.
2. **Charlotte Merhtens**, Director, Millstadt Township Senior Services described the Title 3-B Transportation Program in a rural/urban area that has no public transportation. This transportation is provided for doctor visits, personal care, grocery shopping, renal care, cancer treatments and senior center.
 - As baby boomers become older and seniors are living longer we need to see and increase in funding for these services so that we can continue serving these persons in the rural areas.
3. **Diane Copeland**, Director, Tri Cities Faith in Action Assisted Transportation
The decision to give up driving is very difficult for elders and may lead to increased isolation, depression and decreased access to medical care. An important issue for the older driver pondering driving cessation is “the availability and cost of alternative sources of transportation. Why is assisted transportation needed? With mass transit seniors cited health and mobility difficulties, heat, long waits and walking distance among the challenges in using mass transit. Assisted Transportation is different from mass transit and other transportation programs in that the volunteer accompanies the elder through the door and helps as needed in completing forms at the doctor’s office, scheduling future appointments, reaching items in the grocery store, carrying bags or other challenges. Assisted Transportation programs depend upon the availability of funding and volunteers.
 - Increasing funding available for seniors through the faith-based initiative would help tremendously in making assisted transportation programs, sustainable. The relationships formed through volunteer assisted transportation programs improve the elder’s quality of life, decreasing isolation and increased feelings of security and independence in addition to improved access to medical care.
 - Access to funding and a solid base of available volunteers are important factors to making this service an ongoing solution to the growing need for transportation among elders.

4. **Dennis Cook**, Director, Washington County Senior Services
In rural counties the need for collaboration among transportation providers is essential to provide a quality and cost effective transportation program. In rural areas transportation becomes even more critical but also more costly due to the distances that must be covered and the limited number of riders.
 - When determining aging policy for the future, special attention must be given to the rural population especially those areas without a public transit district.

Panel #2 Housing availability and affordability

1. **Christina Humphrey**, Housing Manager, Madison County Housing Authority
The challenges we face today is the need for accessible housing for those with physical disabilities and seniors. Some building range from 26 to 42 years old with this we do make reasonable accommodations, for example, adding handicap toilets, additional grab bars, lowered security peepholes, and corner guards for the walls. Efforts are constantly being made to help the residents feel safe and secure in their homes. New key systems and security monitors are being added to complexes.
 - Funding must be provided to convert existing public housing units to be more accessible for those with physical disabilities and for seniors.
2. **Reverend Watson**, Sinai Family Life Center, East St. Louis, Illinois
One of the challenges in the community of E. St. Louis is housing stock which is very low and affordable housing is out of the question. Fifty churches pulled together and received 202 housing this will help to eliminate some of the real housing issues. With the 202 housing we were able to build a 40 unit senior facility. Transportation is an issue because of the main through fair. We took a look at the financial concerns in our city and what we really need is assisted living facilities and independent living facilities and with the 202 we can do this. We had a collaborative effort among the churches and another organization because of financial concerns. Affordability is an issue since seniors are on fixed incomes. Some seniors can afford the other housing but they might lack the absence of family. The need for senior to have contact with others is vital. East St. Louis has a real tax situation in the community. Faith Based organizations are just not enough they need collaboration. There has been no senior housing in East St. Louis for 55/60 years and it is a real need.
What we are encouraging is that some of the red tape be eliminated. Persons that want and need to get into housing are borderline and this eliminates them from being eligible for senior housing. Our concern is that we would educate our community and faith based organizations, especially in the urban community to pull together with non-for-profit organizations.
The Family Life Center is going to expand our community 4 blocks North, South, East, and West to develop affordable housing and "Create a

Community that would meet the needs of people” and encourage others to do the same thing.

3. **Marie West**, Executive Director, Rebuilding Together with Christmas in April, Madison County. Christmas in April*Metro East is a non-profit organization that rehabs the homes of low-income, elderly and handicap homeowners. It is our goal to make their homes warm, safe and dry. All the work is done by volunteers on a one-day workday blitz. Over 400 volunteers and the work is done at no cost to the homeowner. We see an increasing need for the elderly homeowners such as accessibility items – ramps, bathroom modification for wheel chairs, etc.

- Communities must have building codes that require universal design principles. There needs to be a bathroom and bedroom on the main floor of every house. There should always be at least one entryway to the main level at street level for handicap accessibility. This would give the aging population the ability to stay in their homes, in independence, for as long as physically possible. This increases their mobility and their mental stability in combating loneliness, depression and a feeling of worthlessness.

Our Program in Madison County, Illinois is primarily funded by the private sector and we receive only \$5,000.00 in Government funding to help make these repairs for aging Americans.

- More opportunities for funding for this type of repairs would be beneficial.

Public Comment written testimony (1)

Information obtained during the United States census conducted in the year 200 indicated that there were 281,421,906 people in the United States. Of those 76,851,985 people we're age 50 and older. Research indicates that approximately 2-3% of the total populations are persons with developmental disabilities. A conservative estimate would indicate that at the time of the census, there were 1,537,040 persons with developmental disabilities age 50 and over living in the United States.

Persons with developmental disabilities have historically not been included when local, state, and federal entities are making plans for the dignity, health, independence and economic security of current and future generations of older persons. Persons with developmental disabilities are living full, productive lives as contributing member of their communities. They have the same rights and deserve equal attention with regards to planning for their future as is directed at their non-disabled peers. Many persons with developmental disabilities dreams, and rely on their support persons to assist them in advocating for themselves.

- Persons with developmental disabilities must be included as we creatively assess aging in America and improve the lives of older Americans. Are there plans to include delegates to represent persons with developmental disabilities at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging?

Closing Comments and Adjournment

Dr. Paulsmeyer and Joy Paeth thanked the presenters for their testimony and requested supplemental written testimony.

The Listening Session was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.